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MR. SPEAKER,

I RISE TODAY TO ADD MY VOICE TO THE CHORUS EXTOLLING THE LIFE OF RONALD REAGAN. ON A SIMILAR OCCASION OVER A CENTURY AGO, LINCOLN SAID OF WASHINGTON, “HOW DO YOU ADD GLORY TO THE SUN?” AND I MUST CONFESS, I FEEL SAME FUTILITY AT TRYING TO ADD MY FEW WORDS TO A LIFE AND LEGACY THAT SHINES SO BRIGHT.

RONALD REAGAN CAME TO THE STAGE WHEN IT APPEARED THAT AMERICA WAS GRASPING AT THE COMPLEXITIES OF MODERNITY. INFLATION, RECESSION, AND UNEMPLOYMENT APPEARED PERMANENT AND THE LIGHT OF FREEDOM APPEARED TO BE DIM. EUROPE WAS ENTHRALLED WITH SOCIALISM AND COMMUNISM AND THE AMERICAN EXCEPTION WAS DENOUNCED AS ARROGANT AND ON THE EDGE OF FAILURE. MUCH LIKE TODAY, WE WERE TOLD WHAT WE NEEDED WAS MORE GOVERNMENT NOT LESS; HIGHER TAXATION, NOT LESS; MORE REGULATION, NOT LESS. REAGAN SAW ALL OF THIS AND HE SMILED.

I WAS AT HIS INAUGURATION. WHEN HE SAID “IT IS TIME FOR US TO REALIZE THAT WE’RE TOO GREAT A NATION TO LIMIT OURSELVES TO SMALL DREAMS,” MY SPINE STIFFENED. I GOT GOOSE BUMPS WHEN HE CALLED OUT “THAT PEACE IS THE HIGHEST ASPIRATION OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE. WE WILL NEGOTIATE FOR IT, SACRIFICE FOR IT; WE WILL NOT SURRENDER FOR IT, NOW OR EVER.”

FROM THAT DAY, I KNEW AMERICA WAS BACK. YOU SEE MANY PEOPLE SPEAK OF THE REAGAN REVOLUTION, I LIKE TO THINK OF IT HAS THE REAGAN RESTORATION. REAGAN RESTORED OUR OPTIMISM, OUR BELIEF IN OUR ABILITY TO CREATE, AND THE BELIEF THAT GOD PUT MAN ON THIS EARTH TO BE FREE AND MADE AMERICA TO PROVE IT.

I WAS IN WASHINGTON THE DAY REAGAN WAS SHOT. I HELD MY BREATH AND WAS GLUED TO THE T.V. THE HUMOR, STRENGTH AND COURAGE THAT WERE REAGAN’S CAME THROUGH AND, ALONG WITH THE REST OF AMERICA, I LAUGHED WHEN HE SAID “HONEY, I FORGOT TO DUCK.”

RONALD REAGAN CHANGED THE PARADIGM. HE CHANGED AMERICA’S FOREIGN POLICY FROM ONE OF BENIGN CONTAINMENT TO ACTIVE CONFRONTATION AND FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE COMMUNISM BEGAN EXTENDING ITS SINISTER REACH, WE SAW ITS HAND PUSHED BACK, AND THAT GAVE US HOPE.

REAGAN CONFRONTED THE EVIL HE SAW IN THE WORLD AND HE DID IT WITHOUT APOLOGY. HE BATTLED COMMUNISM. HE ARMED THE RESISTANCE IN AFGHANISTAN; HE SENT TROOPS TO GRENADA; LEBANON; AND PERSHING TO EUROPE. IN A COURAGEOUS MOVE HE WALKED AWAY FROM NEGOTIATIONS AT REYKJAVIK. TO THE CRIES OF THE LEFT AND CHATTERING CLASSES HE HELD FIRM TO THE BELIEF THAT AMERICA NEVER SHOULD AND NEVER WOULD SURRENDER HER RIGHT TO DEFEND HERSELF. MIKHAIL GORBACHEV HAS SAID REYKJAVIK WAS THE TURNING POINT. HIS STRENGTH BROKE THE BACK OF THE SOVIETS.

BEFORE THE BRITISH PARLIAMENT, REAGAN ENVISAGED THAT THE LAST PAGES OF COMMUNISM WERE BEING WRITTEN AND IN THOSE FAMOUS WORDS PREDICTED THAT TOTALITARIANISM WOULD BE CONSIGNED TO THE “ASH HEAP OF HISTORY.” HE WAS DERIDED. YET FEW COULD KNOW HOW PROPHETIC HIS WORDS WOULD BE, OR HOW FAST THE FALL WOULD COME.

IN 1989, SOVIET CITIZENS VOTED FOR THE FIRST TIME. PRO-DEMOCRACY DEMONSTRATIONS WERE HELD IN TIANANMEN SQUARE. LECH WALESZA WAS ELECTED PRESIDENT OF POLAND. SHORTLY THEREAFTER, THE EASTERN EUROPEAN SOVIET BLOC CLOSED THE DOOR ON COMMUNISM FOR DEMOCRACY. IN NOVEMBER, THE BERLIN WALL WAS OPENED AND, AS REAGAN WOULD HAVE IT, AN ANONYMOUS GERMAN STRUCK THE FIRST BLOW AT TEARING DOWN WALL. THE FOLLOWING YEAR, IN FREE ELECTIONS DEFEATED THE COMMUNIST SANDINISTAS AND THE SOVIET UNION WAS DISSOLVED. THE LIGHT OF FREEDOM EXTENDED ITS REACH.

REAGAN HAS BEEN SO OFTEN CALLED THE GREAT COMMUNICATOR, BUT I LIKE TO THINK ABOUT HIS TIME IN OFFICE AND HIS LEGACY IN A DIFFERENT WAY. HIS VICTORY WAS NOT OF COMMUNICATION, BUT A TRIUMPH OF CONTENT—THE CONTENT OF HIS IDEAS. HE REIGNITED THE LIGHT OF FREEDOM. HE CUT TAXES AND REGULATION AND IN 8 YEARS CREATED 19 MILLION JOBS. HE REMINDED US THAT THE PATH TO PROSPERITY WAS ONE OF INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY. AS REAGAN HAS SAID, THESE WERE NOT HIS IDEAS, BUT THEY WERE AMERICAN IDEAS. REAGAN THOUGHT HIS REVOLUTION WAS “MORE LIKE THE GREAT REDISCOVERY, A REDISCOVERY OF OUR VALUES AND OUR COMMON SENSE.”

SO, AS WE HONOR PRESIDENT REAGAN LET US REMEMBER HIS HUMILITY, HIS DIGNITY, HIS KIND WORDS AND MOST OF ALL HIS COURAGE. LET US HONOR THE LEGACY OF PRESIDENT REAGAN WITH A RENEWED COMMITMENT TO THE EXCEPTIONALISM THAT MAKES US AMERICAN. LET US RENEW FREEDOM’S PROMISE TO THOSE WHO LIVE IN OPPRESSIVE TYRANNY. LET US RENEW OUR DETERMINATION, OUR COURAGE, AND OUR STRENGTH. AND LET US RENEW OUR FAITH AND OUR HOPE.

THERE ARE MANY WHO STAND AGAINST FREEDOM AND PEACE. THERE ARE MANY WHO CRITICIZE AND COMPROMISE, BUT LET US HONOR RONALD REAGAN BY STANDING FIRM, WITH RESOLVE, IN THIS TIME OF WAR.

WE CAN DO IT. WHY? AS REAGAN WOULD SAY, “AFTER ALL, WE ARE AMERICANS.”